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7 December 2023

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Dear Mrs Jordan

Special measures monitoring inspection of Sir Herbert Leon Academy

This letter sets out the findings from the monitoring inspection that took place on 8 and 9 November 2023, on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills. The monitoring inspection was carried out under section 8(2) of the Education Act 2005 and was the third monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require special measures following the graded (section 5) inspection that took place in May 2022.

The purpose of a monitoring inspection is not to grade the school's overall effectiveness, but to identify and report on the school's progress. It is to highlight to the school and parents any improvements that school leaders have made since the school's previous graded inspection.

During the inspection, Sue Keeling, His Majesty's Inspector (HMI), and I discussed with you and other senior leaders and staff, the chief executive officer (CEO) of the trust, other representatives of the trust and the chair of the interim standards board (ISB) the actions that have been taken to improve the school since the most recent graded inspection. We discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also visited some lessons, tutor time and an assembly, and met with groups of pupils. We scrutinised a range of documents relating to safeguarding, behaviour and the school's curriculum, including provision for personal development. I also took account of staff's and parents' views submitted online via Ofsted's confidential surveys. I have considered all this in coming to my judgement.

Leaders have made progress to improve the school, but more work is necessary for the school to be no longer judged as requiring special measures.

I am of the opinion that the school may appoint early career teachers.

The school should take further action to:

- ensure that pupils in all year groups learn more and remember more of the curriculum, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The progress made towards the removal of special measures

Since the previous monitoring visit in June 2023, several changes have been made to how the school is organised. Some extra staff have been employed to accommodate a growth in pupil numbers. The capacity of the pastoral team has increased, with new roles for an attendance officer, a counsellor and a home-school liaison worker. Subject teams are now grouped together under new 'directors of faculty', who sit as part of the school's wider senior leadership team. The school's timetable has been adjusted so that there are now six lessons a day. This has allowed time for all pupils to receive weekly lessons of personal, social and health education (PSHE). It has also allowed the school to increase the breadth of subjects that pupils can study at key stage 4. These important structural changes underpin the improvements evident during this inspection.

Leaders' and trustees' oversight and monitoring of safeguarding practice in the school has continued to strengthen so that safeguarding is now effective. Leaders and staff are well trained in how to recognise and support pupils at risk of harm or in need of extra help. There is a strong understanding of local contextual issues. Leaders make use of a wide range of external agencies to provide help and advice for pupils when they need it.

The changes you have made to the school environment and how pastoral support is organised mean that pupils now feel safe in school. Reducing the spaces that pupils can use at breaktimes has allowed you to make sure that there are now enough staff on duty in the places where pupils need them. While corridors are still busy, pupils' behaviour is noticeably calmer. The atmosphere as pupils move around the school is much more positive than it was. Pupils like the new, colourful friezes on the walls. One said it makes the school appear less clinical and more like a place for learning.

The work you have done to listen to and respond to pupils' views and experiences of their interactions with each other has made a positive difference. Pupils told us that there are far fewer incidents of discriminatory behaviour and bullying than there were in the past. The open use of racist, homophobic and sexist language is much reduced. Some older pupils told us that they recognised how hard staff were working to address issues of racism and to counter the views of a minority that racism is a 'normalised' part of society.

You have successfully reinforced messages about whom pupils can talk to if they need help. Importantly, pupils are now confident that staff will listen to them if they have any

worries. In particular, the proportion of girls who are reluctant to talk to adults about concerns of sexual harassment has significantly reduced. Pupils told us that their tutors, year leaders, the home-school link worker and the counsellor are all there to help them if they need it.

More consistent use of the behaviour management system, along with consistent messages about positive behaviour through the personal development programme, is making a difference. Common expectations of pupils' behaviour are now well understood by pupils and staff. Staff are calmer when managing poor behaviour because they are more confident in the system. Pupils, too, are happier because they can see sanctions are being applied fairly. As one pupil told me: 'Teachers don't race to the red card now; they go through the steps.' As a result, the number of incidents of disruptive behaviour during lessons is reducing.

You are starting to use your analysis of behaviour more effectively. There are still some pupils for whom behaving well is a struggle, and suspensions have understandably risen while you enforce your new expectations. However, there is a concerted effort being made to understand pupils' behaviour in order to address it. For example, new 'student action panels', attended by senior leaders, are helping you to identify the best approaches to help pupils with more challenging behaviour. Your next stage is to ensure that staff have this information in a usable format.

You are rightly concerned about pupils' attendance. Last year, just under half of pupils were persistently absent. With impressive help and oversight from trust leaders, school leaders are getting better at interrogating attendance data. Consequently, leaders now know which pupils particularly struggle to attend regularly. They are working hard to understand the reasons for pupils' absence and to find solutions to pupils' barriers to attending school regularly. There are clear procedures for staff to follow when a pupil is absent. Leaders check these processes are followed precisely. The expanded pastoral team is helping to shift attitudes. Parents told us that they appreciated help from this team. Pupils told us that staff as a whole are reinforcing the importance of regular attendance. Although attendance is still not good, it is starting to improve as a result of these better systems being in place.

Your new PSHE programme is helping pupils to be better informed about the society they live in, where they might encounter risks to their safety and how people can interact with each other positively. You have chosen, for now, that lessons are delivered by a core group of senior staff. Pupils like this, and they are starting to take these new lessons seriously. This is testament to leaders' hard work to make sure this programme reflects pupils' local context and knowledge of how to keep themselves safe. You are now starting to make sure that useful adaptations help pupils who have SEND access this important learning.

Other aspects of provision for pupils' personal development are also improving. You are well on the way to establishing an effective careers provision, and the 'SHLA pledge' that

all pupils will benefit from a five-year programme of cultural activities is underway, with numerous trips and visits planned for the year ahead.

I did not look at provision for pupils with SEND at my last visit in June, because the special educational needs coordinator had only just started at the school. Since then, she has laid the foundations of effective provision for pupils with SEND, and education, health and care plans have been updated to better reflect pupils' needs. You are in the early stages of making sure that there is better identification of pupils' needs, so that effective extra help can be put in place for pupils who need it. Information about adaptations to learning for pupils with SEND has now been shared with staff. However, staff are not yet familiar enough with the requirements to make regular, effective adaptations for pupils with SEND. As a result, pupils with SEND do not learn as well as they could. You have identified that the school's next stage is to provide more training for staff in adaptive teaching, and to ensure that senior and faculty leaders include monitoring of provision for pupils with SEND as part of their regular monitoring of the quality of education.

You have established a regular programme of continued professional development alongside monitoring and coaching for staff, to help ensure consistent application of the schools' policies. The first phases rightly focused on ensuring staff understood safeguarding and behaviour expectations and that there were common basic expectations for how classrooms should be organised. This has resulted in pupils' improved behaviour and increased confidence in the school and staff as a whole. You reflected that classrooms are now places where 'teachers can teach'.

The establishment of common classroom expectations puts you in a strong position to improve the quality of education so that pupils' outcomes improve. Currently, pupils are not learning enough in some subjects. This is because expectations for what pupils can achieve are not consistently high, and the curriculum in some subjects is not ambitious enough. The curriculum in some subjects does not clearly identify the important knowledge that pupils need to know and be able to do at each stage of their education, and the order in which pupils need to learn it. There are not strong enough processes in place to help teachers to understand what pupils' gaps in learning are. Sometimes, the activities teachers choose do not help pupils to learn important knowledge. Teachers do not focus strongly enough on checking that all pupils are truly learning what they are being taught before moving on to teaching more knowledge.

As leaders, you have established new line management structures that are adding to the school's capacity to improve further. The ISB knows the school well. It uses its knowledge to challenge and support the school on its improvement journey. The support and monitoring from the trust, along with help from external teaching and subject experts, is plentiful, and very much still needed as systems start to embed. During the inspection, we reflected that the school 'feels' very different to how it did a few months ago. You reflected that the school is now well placed to make the changes needed to improve the curriculum and to refocus teaching to ensure all pupils learn well.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the CEO of the Academies Enterprise multi-academy trust, the Department for Education's regional director and the director of children's services for Milton Keynes. This letter will be published on the Ofsted reports website.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Old
His Majesty's Inspector